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SUBJECT: ADDIS ABABA EAC MEETS TO ASSESS SECURITY SITUATION IN OGADEN REGION OF ETHIOPIA AFTER KILLINGS/KIDNAPPING OF CHINESE OIL WORKERS AND ETHIOPIANS.

¶1. (U) ACTION REQUEST: See paragraph 9.

¶2. (U) On March 25, Post's Emergency Action Committee (EAC) met to assess the security situation in Ethiopia's Somali (Ogaden) Region in response to previous day's attack on a Chinese oil drilling facility. EAC members present included COM, DCM, ORA, DAO, CJTF HOA, POL/ECON, USAID, CDC, CONS, Peace Corps, Health Unit, MGT, PAS, MSG and RSO.

¶3. (U) The RSO briefed the EAC regarding the situation. On March 24, an armed group of 200 individuals conducted a day-time attack on a Chinese oil drilling operation located in Abole, Ethiopia. Abole is located in the Somali (Ogaden) Region, approximately 60 miles south of the regional capital (Jijiga) and approximately 20 miles from the border with Somalia. The following casualties were reported as result of this attack:

- 9 Chinese oil workers killed;
- 7 Chinese oil workers kidnapped;
- 20 Chinese oil workers wounded;
- 65 local people residing outside the oil camp killed.
- An unknown number of Ethiopian troops securing the area reported killed and injured.

¶4. (U) The size of this attack indicates it was well planned and organized. An Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) spokesman in London has claimed responsibility for the attack, stating it was in response to exploitation of resources (oil) by the GOE and other outsiders in their region. The statement by the ONLF further advised that future attempts by the GOE and foreigners to exploit the resources in the region would result in similar action.

¶5. (SBU) The RSO advised the EAC to revise the consular information sheet to discourage American citizens from traveling to the Ogaden and Somalia border regions unless they are directly involved in the implementation of humanitarian relief efforts. Travel to this region by personnel under Chief of Mission authority is carefully reviewed, and only approved on a limited case-by-case basis in concurrence with the executive Office. The RSO advised the EAC he is inclined to disapprove most travel by personnel under COM authority to the region for security concerns.

¶6. (SBU) The EAC agreed the above consular information sheet guidance should be strengthened in response to the above situation. The proposed updated guidance will state as follows (subject to approval from the Department):

BEGIN TEXT.

Since the mid-1990's, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and government forces have clashed around Harar and in the Somali regional state, particularly in the Ogaden region. In April 2007, the ONLF claimed responsibility for attacking a Chinese oil exploration installation near Jijiga, in Ethiopia's Somali Region, after battling government forces. The attack resulted in several Chinese nationals killed or sequestered, and caused numerous Ethiopian civilian and military casualties. Cross-border travel by road from Ethiopia into Somalia is not advised. Somali groups affiliated with terrorist organizations may occasionally operate within the Somali, Oromiya, and Afar regions. Additionally, in December 2006, the Ethiopian Government announced military operations against the Council of Islamic Courts in Somalia. An African Union peacekeeping force, AMISOM, is currently deployed in Somalia, but military operations continue in Mogadishu as of April 12007. American citizens are reminded that the U.S. Embassy strongly discourages travel to the Ethiopia's Somali Region and that a Travel Warning has been issued advising against all travel to Somalia.

END TEXT.

¶7. (SBU) The EAC also agreed this situation merited the following proposed warden message (subject to approval from the Department):

BEGIN TEXT

The U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa strongly discourages American citizens from traveling to Ethiopia's Somali Region (Ogaden). An April 24 armed attack against a Chinese oil company installation in this region resulted in the death, kidnapping and wounding of Chinese personnel, in addition to the death and wounding of numerous local citizens. American citizens are reminded that the U.S.

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Embassy only approves travel of Embassy personnel to the Somali Region (Ogaden) of Ethiopia on a case-by-case basis. American citizens are advised to remain vigilant, avoid demonstrations or large gatherings, and to be cautious when frequenting prominent public places and landmarks.

END TEXT

¶8. (SBU) While the ONLF's statement indicates this attack was conducted against GOE military and foreign oil prospecting personnel in response to exploitation of resources in their region, this incident resulted in the deaths of a large number of indigenous individuals who reside in the area immediately surrounding the oil drilling facility. While the EAC agreed this attack and the ONLF's threats are not directed against USG or international humanitarian relief interests in the region, one cannot discount the fact it was conducted on a large scale, resulted in a large number of casualties, and that the Ogaden is a large, desolate region with little law and order and is rife with banditry, especially in the rural areas.

¶9. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Given the unprecedented nature and scale of this attack, which resulted in deaths of third-country nationals, Post requests the Department review and consideration of what steps should be taken to raise the ONLF's position on the Department's terrorist exclusion list. Post will continue to monitor the situation and will report additional details SEPTEL.

¶10. (SBU) The Ambassador has sent condolence letters to Prime Minister Meles and the Chinese Charge. The Defense Attache has sent condolence letters to his contacts at the Chinese Embassy and the Ethiopian Military.

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